

c 5877 Nathan Strong

A
S E R M O N,

PREACHED IN HARTFORD,

JUNE 10th, 1797,

AT THE EXECUTION OF

RICHARD DOANE.



By Nathan Strong, A.

MINISTER OF THE NORTH PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
IN HARTFORD.



TO WHICH IS ADDED,

A SHORT ACCOUNT OF HIS LIFE,

AS GIVEN BY HIMSELF:

ALSO OF THE STATE OF HIS MIND DURING THE

TIME OF HIS CONFINEMENT,

AND AT HIS DEATH.

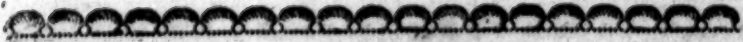


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1797.





S E R M O N,

AT THE EXECUTION OF

RICHARD DOANE.



HOSEA vi. 6.

*For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge
of God more than burnt offering.**

I HAVE chosen these words for the subject of my discourse, by the particular desire of the unhappy man, who is to be executed this day.—He considers himself held up before mankind, as a warning of the bitter consequences of sin; and the danger of living immorally and thoughtless of God. He has desired me to employ the present short opportunity, which we have for religious worship, both in advising him for his solemn appearance before the tribunal of his Judge, and in reminding those who are spectators, that unless we

* The preacher is sensible that many will suppose the text improper for the occasion. It was chosen by the prisoner, and he could not be so well pleased with another. It appeared that what he supposed Divine light, and an astonishing view of God's character, broke in upon his mind, in reading this passage.

repent we shall all likewise perish ; and that those who forget God, and disobey his commandments, though they may escape an ignominious end in this world, must in eternity expect to meet evils more dreadful than the pain or shame of an execution by the hands of men.

THE occasion is very solemn and affecting. I hope we may improve the hour in receiving instruction from this spectacle, and in earnest prayer that the man who is soon to die, may find mercy and salvation in God before whom he is soon to come.

THE scripture of which my text is a part, describes the sin of men ; the reason of God's displeasure with them ; and the necessity and wisdom of his judgments.

I shall, First, paraphrase the text in connexion with the context.

SECONDLY, make such an improvement as naturally arises from the passage and from the occasion of our meeting.

IN the verses before the text God says, *O Ephraim what shall I do unto thee? O Judah what shall I do unto thee? for your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it passeth away.—Therefore have I hewed them by my prophets; I have slain them by the words of my mouth: and thy judgments are as the light that goeth forth. They like men have transgressed the covenant, there have they*

dealt treacherously against me. This is a description of their conduct, as it was seen by the eye of Omniscience. Our text also describes the temper and practice to which forgiveness is encouraged. *For I desire mercy more than sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.* Mercy and a knowledge of God, in this passage, mean true holiness and a conformity of heart to the moral character of God, and spiritual obedience to his commandments. The men whom our text reproved, had the means of religion and a doctrinal acquaintance with their duty. They had knowledge, instruction, and warning, as we have at the present day. They sometimes resolved and promised a religious life, and from these transient resolutions of an awakened hour, they hoped God would be merciful; but God says, their goodness or consideration was as the morning cloud, and as the early dew that passeth away. They resolved to serve God, only when they feared his judgments, and were forced to consideration, by some melancholy spectacle of the danger of sin, as we are at the present moment. God hewed them by his prophets—He warned them by the ministers of religion, of the end to which they must come without repentance;—He slew them by the words of his mouth,—by his law and threatnings, denounced the certain consequences of forgetting him and his commandments. Because judgment against their evil works was not instantly executed, they determined God to be like themselves, and hoped there was no evil to come. To teach them there was an evil to come, his judgments were as a light that shineth. The judgments of God in

this world are most wonderfully appointed. The state of probation in which men are placed, forbids the full execution of justice upon them.—This would be inconsistent with such use of means as are appointed unto repentance; still if there were no judgments they would wholly forget God. He therefore appoints his judgments in wonderful wisdom, so as not to prevent a state of trial, and at the same time remind us that the wages of sin are death. There are so many of God's judgments on sin, that if our hearts are set to do evil because the full punishment is not speedily executed, the conduct is most unreasonable. His judgments are as a light that goeth forth, confirming the sentence of his law, that the wages of sin are death. They have been so from the beginning, and are before our eyes on this solemn occasion.

IN further describing those whom God reproved, he says, they like men transgressed the covenant, and dealt treacherously against him.—A sinful life, in the greatest part of those who indulge themselves, may fitly be called treachery. In some general sense, they profess to believe he is God, and promise to obey him; but where the heart is disobedient, and his character and law are not revered and loved, the whole is a treacherous profession; and if those who make it, are ever brought to see God and themselves truly, they will be sensible it is the case.

THE character drawn in the context applies to a great variety of persons. To those who against knowledge live in the vicious indulgence of their

passions and appetites :—Who having sufficient evidence there is a God, go thro' days and years in forgetfulness of him, in impiety, profaneness, thinking only of time, the world and present amusements :—To those who do not realize their obligation to live for the glory of their maker :—To those, whose minds are so much taken up with present things, as to forget they are soon to die and come into judgment :—To those who live without prayer and in neglect of the institution of religion ; and to all who have not a supreme love of God, his law and government.—The great defect of all such persons, is, they have not that holiness, mercy and knowledge of God in their hearts and practice, in which true obedience consists. Being destitute of a true love of God, and carnal and selfish in their whole disposition, and unfeeling of moral obligation, it is strange they do not commit more of those crimes that must be punished by the hand of civil justice.

A want of love and obedience to God implies a heart capable of any other crime. He who fails in love, and is unjust and treacherous to his God is certainly, by the same disposition, capable of enmity and treachery to his fellow-creatures. And when we see very many, who give no evidence of a delight in God ; it must be imputed to special divine respect and care, that we are not much oftener called to such solemn scenes as are before us this day.—When we look on an unhappy man whom God hath left to expose himself to this death, we may fitly realize a distinguishing goodness of God, that we are not in his place.—Though not

under the sentence of human laws, we are condemned by the divine law. The goodness of the best hath been too much like a morning cloud. It is God's providence and not our own natural dispositions, which hath preserved us from punishable crimes. There is no safety in that evil heart, which deals treacherously towards God, by not loving him; and which is destitute of an experimental knowledge of his sanctifying grace. If we are sanctified by his holy spirit, sovereign grace hath done the work; and if not sanctified, the only cause which preserves, is that Almighty power, which means to uphold a certain degree of order in the world. The best preservative is mercy and a knowledge of God. These in our text, stand opposed to sacrifice and burnt offering. The first means a holy conformity to the divine goodness, and a sanctifying knowledge of God and his commandments. This is a divine temper of the soul, which resists temptation—makes sin appear hateful—and delights in glorifying God, and doing good to men. The last, sacrifice and burnt offering, as they stand opposed in the text to mercy and a knowledge of the Lord, mean that general or formal or unaffected belief of God, his law and our own duty; and that inconstant attention to the institutions of religion, which are consistent with a greater love of the world and its interests, of ourselves and our own lusts, than we have of God himself. In this, there is little efficacy for preservation.—And all of this character, ought to feel that it is God's care of the world and not their own principles, which keep them from sudden ruin in time and eternity. In those principles of sin which de-

ny God his right, men can find no safety to themselves; nor can there be any safety to the world. Public safety in the midst of such principles, must be ascribed to the controlling power of the Almighty; and when the time comes, either in this or the next world, that the shining of his judgments is necessary for general good, he will leave the sinner to show himself and meet deserved punishment.

SECONDLY, I am to make such an improvement of the subject, as naturally arises from the passage that hath been paraphrased, and from the occasion of our meeting. And I shall do this, First, with reference to the congregation at large. Secondly, in special application to the unhappy man, who is to go from hence to the place of his execution.

1. BOTH the subject and the occasion teach how much God is displeased with us, if we are not holy and sanctified in our temper and practice. If we have not that true knowledge of God, which implies pure affections of the heart, our state is full of danger, both for time and eternity. The common mercies and bounties of providence, are no evidence God is pleased with us, for these he bestows both on the good and the evil, the just and the unjust. How many ungrateful men he feeds and cloaths. To how many vicious men doth he grant the common preservation of life, even preserving them for a season, from the destruction that naturally follows their criminal appetites and passions. God doth not this to encourage sin; but by an exhibition of his forbearance, to draw

them to repentance, and to preserve the world in such a state of peace, as is the best probation for eternity. All who have not a true knowledge of God, are under his displeasure. He doth not preserve because he is pleased with them. Their doctrinal knowledge will not avert the final judgment. Their general profession of Christianity will not save them. Unless their hearts be changed the time will soon come, either in this or another world, when the judgment of God will go forth against them, to show his own holiness, and to make his own kingdom very glorious.

2dly. WE ought to consider the danger to ourselves, that is inbred with the principles of sin and a departure from God. Sin cannot be made a safe thing. The ingredients of a hell, both present and future, are in its very nature. Why are not the sinners of this world perfectly miserable beings at this moment? Not because their principles do not lead to it; but God to answer his infinitely wise purposes, holds them from it. Sin admits no happiness in the enjoyment of God, nor in a view of his law and government. It destroys peace of conscience and that inward harmony, which makes existence blessed. It counteracts all social felicity, turning men's hands and hearts against one another. While a sinful creature dreads God as his Judge, he ought to dread himself as the immediate instrument of his own wretchedness. He carries in his own bosom the cause and means of his unhappiness, and there can be no safety to him in his own principles. Instead of thinking hard of God, for those evils which his sins bring upon him,

he ought to adore that preserving goodness, which hath hitherto kept him from utter ruin.

3dly. THIS occasion is a solemn instruction, not only in the dangerous nature of sinful principles in general, but of several particular kinds of sin, which are very prevalent among mankind. Intemperance is a sinful habit, which ruins a great number of mankind, and leads them to such high crimes as are capitally punished by the laws of men. I am charged by my own conscience, and desired by the unhappy man who suffers this day, on the present occasion to speak freely of the danger of this sin. Though this man hath hitherto denied any prepenſe, malicious intention of murder, he speaks in most feeling terms of the danger of sin, of forgetting God, and of an unchaſte, intemperate life. He traces back most of his unhappiness in life, and especially this awful scene, to impure connexions and to intemperance. The sin of drunkenness hath been a principal means of bringing him to this case. And he is only one of many thousands of mankind, who have come to the same end by the same means. A mind intoxicated with liquor, is prepared to mingle with the most impure and abandoned companions, and to commit any violence. Almost every violence that takes place in civilized society, and family unhappiness may be traced to intemperance as their cause. How many rational creatures it turns into beasts of prey! how many families it cloaths with rags and deprives of bread! how often it disturbs the otherwise peaceful neighbourhood! how many it brings to death by the hand of public justice! how

many souls it ruins for both worlds!—Those, who give themselves up to this sin, rashly defy all possible misery. This prevailing vice, is greatly promoted by tipling houses and dram shops, where the incautious gradually acquire a habit which proves their ruin. Every such place is a deep evil in society, and a nursery for murder and eternal ruin. I do not know any way in which the civil authority can make themselves more worthy of respect, or do greater good to the public, who are placed under their care, than by a faithful execution of our good laws, against such places and against those persons who give themselves up to intemperance. If any think I speak too freely on this subject, as my vindication, I beg them to look to that spectacle now in our eyes.—Look to yonder place of execution, around which we shall soon be gathered, to behold the most awful of all sights. And let us remember that this event is as a light which shineth, teaching us the present nature of sin, and the more awful judgments of God on such as live and die unreformed.

I am in the last place to apply myself to the man who is soon to die.

My unhappy Fellow-Creature,

I call you unhappy in the sight of men, as one whom the holy providence of God appoints to an ignominious death. There is, nevertheless, room for you to be eternally happy in the world to which you are soon going. It is the glory of the gospel, that it proclaims salvation to the chief of repenting sinners, thro' Jesus Christ. If you have repented of

all your sins, you may go by this death to which you are appointed, to a heaven of glorious and eternal happiness. If you have truly repented, the riches of divine grace in Jesus Christ and the sovereignty of divine love will be glorified in plucking you as a brand out of the burning; from that vicious, inconsiderate and prayerless life, in which you acknowledge you have generally lived. If you have truly repented, you will thank God forever, even for these severe means of saving you from your sin. But remember that it is a hard question for men to determine, whether they have repented, and you have only an hour or two more to examine. I am sensible that you profess to believe most of those doctrines, which Christians generally receive; and also to hope that you have been forgiven by God, thro' a true repentance and faith. But as your eternal happiness is depending, you cannot review this matter too closely in the few moments you have left. Pray, pray earnestly to God, that he would enlighten, while I make some remarks for your assistance. The infinite goodness of God is an acknowledged truth; but this is no certain evidence you are going to happiness, for his goodness may require him to punish you in another world as he doth in this.—Your doctrinal knowledge will not save; for the heart is often very bad, where the understanding is well indoctrinated.—Your own righteousness will not save you; for certainly, you have nothing of your own, but a life of sin to present before your Judge,—visible sins, and a heart full of sin and forgetfulness of your maker. It must be pure gospel—pure sovereign grace—pure sanctifying grace, that saves you

if you be saved. If you feel as though there ever has been, or now is, any thing in you deserving of God's favor ; if you think your cries and prayers form any kind of challenge on God ; this would prove you destitute of true Christian humility and still unforgiven. Christ's promises in the gospel are many and glorious ; but you have no right to place any dependence on these, of being ever happy ; unless your heart hath complied with the conditions on which they are made. They are made only to a holy repentance, and other gracious affections of the same moral nature. Every man will in some sense repent, when he meets the bitter fruits of sinning ; but this is more properly called, mourning for the punishment than for the sin.—Hating misery is no evidence of hating sin.—Flying from punishment, is no evidence of flying from transgression:

If your repentance be holy and sincere, you will mourn for your sins, more on account of the dishonor done to God, and his kingdom, than for the shame and condemnation it brings on yourself.—You will hate it as unreasonable—as contrary to the most solemn moral obligation—and base in its very nature.

A holy love, doth not arise from an apprehension, that God will bestow great benefits on you personally.—To love God, only because we think he loves us, is what every unforgiven, unholy sinner may do. The infinite perfection of God's nature, law and government, is the reason for which a true penitent loves him ; and if he supposed that

he should never be forgiven himself, he would still say the Lord's character is lovely.

A saving faith is a receiving of Christ, as glorious in his nature, whole character and offices.—To rely on him as a deliverer from punishment and not from sin, is not a gracious exercise.—To the true believer, Christ's power to sanctify appears like a most excellent part of his mediatorial character.—If you are a gospel penitent, you will feel a sensible love of God's law, and choose it as the rule of your affections, tho' you know it condemns you. You will say his providence is right—you will rejoice that he reigns, and have no desire to take the government from his hands.

I have plainly expressed to you some principal Christian exercises, by which you are in this solemn moment to try yourself. A consciousness that you possess these exercises, is the only certain evidence of God's mercy to you, and that you are prepared to die. If you have become a penitent man; tho' conscious of your own total unworthiness, it will be a pleasure to you to pray to God, and to humble yourself before him in the deepest expressions of self abasement.—Prayer to God is the most useful manner in which you can spend the short remainder of your life.—Prayer will bring God into your view; and the more truly you see God, the more truly also you will see yourself, and feel your guilt. Look to him to forgive a sinner, who deserves nothing but to be eternally cast off. Ask mercy and the forgiveness of your sins, for the sole sake of Jesus Christ. If you have any thing in

your heart against any man, now forgive and pray for him ; for he who doth not forgive, shall not be forgiven. Feel as though you had no enemies but your own sins ; and realize that none but God can sanctify you.

MAY the Lord go with you from this place, and give you a humble fortitude in the event you are to meet ; and when your eyes are closed in death, may God have mercy on your soul. AMEN.

A
SHORT ACCOUNT
OF THE LIFE OF
RICHARD DOANE,

AS GIVEN BY HIMSELF;

ALSO OF THE STATE OF HIS MIND DURING THE
TIME OF HIS CONFINEMENT,
AND AT HIS DEATH.



THE man who was lately executed by the name of RICHARD DOANE, was sentenced to death, by the Superior Court in September, 1796, to be executed December 14th.—The General Assembly, on his application at their October Session, reprieved him until June 10th, 1797, at which time he was executed for the murder of DANIEL M'IVER.

He gave the following account of himself:—That he was born in a large city of Great-Britain, in the year 1755, of reputable parents.—That his father was a man of activity and business; his mother, apparently, a woman of piety and much devoted to the duties of religion. He was instructed

in the principles of the Christian religion, in his youth, under one of the most eminent divines of the day. He said that his connexion in marriage with a virtuous woman, to whom he was attached in affection from his early youth, contrary to the wishes of friends, was the cause of bringing him to America. That he refused more lucrative employments offered him by his friends, for the sake of living with the object of his affections. His business was a stone-cutter. He came into the southern part of the United States, where he lived regularly and industriously, until the death of his wife and their only child. He represented her as a person of much virtue and discretion, and considered her death as the beginning of his real misfortunes. Her death threw him into a state of great dejection, for a considerable time, and disqualified him for business, when he began an intemperate life as a remedy for sorrow. After several years he emerged from the gloom, and would labor industriously for a number of weeks, and then in a fit of intoxication spend his earnings and give himself up to profaneness and impiety.

It doth not appear that he was a malicious man, when free from the influence of spiritous liquor; but in his periods of intoxication was often abusive, and was under this influence when he put an end to the life of M'Iver. A number of his last years were spent in various towns of Connecticut and the vicinity of the state. In his last confinement he spoke with great abhorrence of his past life. Drunkenness, profaneness, and a connexion with evil women were the actual crimes of which

he appeared most sensible. He spoke in most feeling terms of the dreadful state of those who indulge in these vices.—That they not only destroy reputation and health, and disqualify for the confidence of mankind; but lead to every other sin, and provoke a Holy God to give up the sinner to the most awful punishments, in this and another world.

MANY reports have circulated concerning supposed crimes committed by this man, which are doubtless without foundation. It was common for him in his seasons of intoxication, to be abusive both in words and actions, as is usual in drunken people; but there is no evidence that when free from liquor he was malicious or dangerous.

THE man whom he murdered was one of his friends and companions, and the fatal affray arose wholly from intoxication.

PERHAPS none will question that accidental intoxication, lessens the criminality of the violence done in an irrational hour. The case is far different with wilful and habitual drunkards. These persons, even if they lose memory, must have been often informed of their own abuse and violence. They ought to consider, that taking the bottle is taking the dagger; and though they have not any malice against particular individuals, the very act of drinking may be considered as malice against human nature. In this view Doane in his hours of repentance acknowledged his sentence to be a just one, though he had no enmity against the man whose life was destroyed.

SUCH instances as these, warn us, that it is the duty of those who have authority, due both to the public, and to habitual drunkards themselves, to place them in a state of confinement. Had this man, in due time, received the correction of the work-house, it might have saved him from the halter.

THOUGH it be not common for those who have long lived a vicious life to find repentance, God sometimes grants it to magnify the sovereignty and greatness of his mercy, and teach us to seek his favor to the last hour.

It is hoped, that this man was one of those uncommon instances of true repentance and grace.—Much pains were taken by neighbouring Christians, from the beginning of his confinement, to converse and pray with him. It appeared that he had been early indoctrinated in the principles of Christianity, though many of its truths were much effaced by a long course of vice.

SOON after his condemnation, he appeared deeply convinced of guilt in the sight of God, and the terrors of future misery hung upon him. He was led to see a heart, as well as life, full of sin and rebellion against God; and that he might in perfect justice be forever cast off.—After this his mind was strongly affected with a sense of the goodness of God, in giving a Saviour for the salvation of penitents; and to himself in particular, for sparing him so long while he had lived without prayer and in the practice of sin.

HIS hope of his own salvation was very gradually formed, and in the last part of his life appeared to be very strong.

HE uniformly spoke of himself, as a creature guilty and justly condemned, and that nothing but infinite mercy through the blood of Christ, could save him; and appeared strong in a belief that he did rely on this mercy, and approve the character and law of God.

THE distinction, which men often make between little and great sins, appeared to him improper; and he often said, that among all his sins of heart and life, he never had committed one that was small, when considered as against an infinite God. His conduct was very decent and proper thro' the day of execution. In going to the place of death, he said that he felt himself strangely strengthened both in body and mind, and ascribed all to the goodness of God.

AFTER having on the scaffold confessed his irreligious life, warned the spectators against those vices which ruined him, and declared himself free from any murderous intentions against M'Iver, the sentence was executed.

HE committed the names of his connexions in Great-Britain, to the Rev. NATHAN STRONG and Rev. ABEL FLINT, Ministers of the Presbyterian Churches in Hartford, to whom any who are interested in making an inquiry concerning him may apply,

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